

A BRIEF ABSTRACT OF THE
FIRST ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE

NEW YORK SANITARY ASSOCIATION,

For the year ending December 1859.

ALTHOUGH this Association has but recently become fully organized, it has already successfully passed through the trials and dangers of its infancy, and has entered upon labors that demand the wisest exercise of matured powers and harmonized effort.

Among its friends and its present members are embraced a large number of the men whose labors and studies for the promotion of health and happiness among the people, had rendered them conversant with the physical and the moral wants and woes of the masses of our population ; and it was in consequence of knowledge so obtained and labors so directed that the importance of organized and definitely directed effort had become so apparent that the social counsels of a small circle of disinterested laborers in this field, gradually assumed the form of this Sanitary Association.

Truly is it stated in our Manual that "this voluntary Association had its origin in the peculiar necessities of the

times." At the period when our social interviews on this subject were commenced, it was doubted whether there existed sufficiently wide-spread information and interest on sanitary questions to warrant a public organization for the promotion of the great objects, which for years we knew had been of increasing interest to the gentlemen whose labors had stored their minds with the startling facts, and aroused their hearts by the urgent necessities that call for sanitary reforms.*

On every side the evidences of such necessities are too obvious, though apparently disregarded, alike by the masses of the people, and by the constituted civil authorities in whom are vested the power and duty of protecting the community from the preventable causes of disease and great social evils.

The intelligent, thorough, and well directed investigations of the official agents and managers of the more important eleemosynary institutions of this city had fully prepared their minds to appreciate the importance of some definite and organized labors for the promotion of sanitary improvements. The appointment of a special committee for sanitary investigation, by the State Legislature, and the anticipation of an extended and truthful Report of the testimony which that Committee had collected, together with the deplorable

* In our first attempt at organization, it was believed that a Sanitary Association might bring into harmonious activity for the promotion of sanitary and social improvement, all the agencies and institutions that are concerned in eleemosynary, benevolent, and reformatory efforts in this city. The projectors of this Association freely consulted with the principal directors of those institutions, and have reason to hope for their continued and cordial co-operation in the labors which are before us. Our public dispensaries and the various associations for relieving the poor, and reforming the vicious, are engaged in a noble work; but much more important is the work of closing up the fountains of disease, want, and vice!

condition of the city, the high death-rate of its population, and the alarming increase of associated physical and moral evils among the lower classes of the people, served to arouse the advocates of sanitary reform to fresh efforts.

Fortunately, as the season advanced, and as the Press co-operated with, and gave publicity to, the efforts and views of sanitarians, and to the investigations of the Senate Sanitary Committee, all classes of intelligent citizens became interested to such a degree as to not only warrant, but demand, an efficient organization for the promotion and protection of the public health, and for the diffusion of information on the subject of personal, domiciliary, and public hygiene.

To develope the complete plan of labors originally designed by the Association, as stated in ARTICLE SECOND of its constitution, will require time and the continuance of patient and united effort. It is manifest that too much attention will not be given, nor too much labor bestowed in the investigation of facts and principles relating to personal, domiciliary, and public Hygiene, while those facts and principles remain subject to any doubtful interpretation or professional and popular misapprehension.

Though the strictly medical facts in sanitary science may be regarded as already established, it appears on every hand that many of the most important facts and principles in the phenomena of the physical world, as well as in the social, political, and moral history of our rapidly growing American cities, demand continual and philanthropic study.

The Essays of physicians upon the sanitary relations of pure air, proper food, sunlight, exercise, and industrial occupations, show that the more important physical and medical facts in sanitary science are positively determined; but the vivid pictures of the crowded tenement houses, and the life scenes among the masses of the population in this city; the

graphic descriptions of defects and wants of drainage and sewerage, and the varied and vexed questions of social or civil policy, and political economy, that have been presented, studied, and discussed by members of this Association, afford some illustration of the wide scope of sanitary questions, and the variety of talent, learning, and labor which will be required for the prosecution of any department of inquiry in social or sanitary science.

With a ready and just appreciation of the vital importance of all questions relating to the physical or the moral interests of the people, the Daily Press has very faithfully represented the labors and the spirit of the Association, and has devoted considerable attention and space in correctly reporting its proceedings and *some* of its special Reports. And there is no doubt that the Press will continue thus to favor the objects of the Association. It may even be hoped that ere long the leading daily and weekly Journals will undertake the more important work of devoting, at regular periods, a certain portion of their space to well written and practical articles or paragraphs calculated to awaken attention and convey sound instructions on the various subjects connected with human health. A few papers already do this.

But more than this is needed: Great masses of the people will for ever remain in ignorance of the simple principles and means of health, unless special agencies are used for the purpose of conveying directly to each family of the poor and the ignorant, specific and practical information relating to those principles and means in the ordinary concerns of daily life. It is, therefore, earnestly recommended that the Association adopt some specific plan for the accomplishment of this very desirable end.

The present position and prospects of the questions connected with sanitary improvements, the cordial and effective

coöperation of the ministers of the gospel, with the hearty labors of physicians, and all other classes of enlightened citizens who are now the cordial friends and supporters of the Association; the steady and rapid growth of public sentiment and political favor in behalf of such labors, not less than the intelligent purpose, the enlightened zeal, and the harmonious good-will of the members of the Association, give promise of steady progress and ultimate success in the great work which is before us.

